

Informational Interviews

What is an Informational Interview?

While you may think that the best way to job search is to respond to an employer by submitting your resume, the reality is that many of the best opportunities are not advertised (nearly 80% of the job market is made up of 'hidden' jobs). Informational interviews can help you tap into these off-the-radar roles, while being a valuable tool to explore career options and make informed decisions about your career path.

An **informational interview** is an underutilized strategy in job searching and career exploration. Think of an informational interview as a **professional conversation**. Successful networking opportunities can help you find out specific information about a particular industry or role you're interested in from someone who's already established in that field. It gives you a chance to ask questions about the person's role, the company, and the industry, **a way to test the waters before jumping in with both feet**.

As far as who to approach, there are a few ways to do it:

- **Contact someone you already know.** Most common way to network. Even with a few degrees of separation, it never hurts to ask family/friends if they know anyone who could help.
- **Send a cold outreach email/message.** Less common, but successful if done correctly. Reaching out via [LinkedIn](#) can be very effective.

Writing Your Request

Write a **clear message** about why you're reaching out and an **easy-to-understand request**:

- **Ask for help.** "I'd love your help with" or "I hope you'll be able to help me with..."
- **Be clear/concise.** Be specific and make it easy for them to say yes: "I'd love to take you to coffee to learn about how you got your start in marketing and what it's like to work at [your company]; I'm in your area next week and would be happy to meet whenever is most convenient for you."
- **Provide a hook.** Demonstrate why you want to meet. Do you admire their career path, see parallels between your educational paths, or have a shared connection? Whatever it is, mention it.
- **Be extremely considerate.** This person is putting their job on hold for you, so acknowledge how busy they must be (even 15 minutes would be appreciated).
- **Don't make it seem like you're looking for a job.** Make it clear you just want to talk to them about their perspective on their job and industry experience.

Before the Interview

- **Prepare a list of questions** related to the field, role, or company. Don't expect the person you're meeting with to lead the conversation. It's your job to figure out exactly what you want to ask.
- **Organize your questions.** Sort your questions by category: industry, company culture, role and what it involves, work/life balance, etc.
- **Prepare your [elevator pitch](#).** Be prepared to talk about yourself and your career goals.

During the Interview

- **Break the ice.** People generally enjoy talking about themselves, so start by asking about their personal experiences in the field thus far:
 - How did you get your start in this field?
 - What's it like working at your company?
 - What projects are you currently working on?
 - What's your opinion on [insert a recent development in the industry]?
- **Make a positive impression.** Talk about yourself and your career goals (share that [elevator pitch](#)).
- **Get the career advice you came for.** It's time to get the inside info. Exploratory phase questions:
 - How did you come to choose this company over others in this field?
 - What is the most rewarding/challenging thing about working in the industry?
 - How do you think I can best leverage my experience in this field?Further along in the interviewing process? Ask questions related to new hires:
 - What advice would you give me about how to best prepare for an interview?
 - What experiences/skills does your company look for in new hires?
 - What job search advice would you give to someone in my situation?
- **Extend your network.** "Could you recommend a few people to speak with more about a career in marketing?" The likelihood of someone agreeing to chat increases with a mutual connection.

After the Interview (Email Example)

Make sure to follow up. Send a [handwritten thank you note or email](#). Start with an attitude of gratitude, then mention something specific that was memorable that you learned (avoid generalities like "I learned a lot from you"). If they asked for your resume, attach an updated version to move the relationship forward.

Hi [insert name],

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today. I enjoyed talking with you about your experience in [career field] and certainly learned a lot from what you shared. I appreciate all your insights and descriptions of the challenges you're facing.

You mentioned that your team at [company name] is looking to ramp up your content marketing efforts. I'd love to help contribute toward increasing your blog traffic. I've attached ideas I have for your company's strategy, including: [place list of ideas here: it might include keyword suggestions, other strategies for boosting SEO, etc.].

If you're interested, I'd love to get on a call next week and discuss how I can help.

Best regards,
[Your Name]